

# A Canadian Inventory of Historic Building

This summer a survey of Canada's old buildings was launched in two dozen cities from Dawson in the Yukon to St. John's, Newfoundland. The national survey, initiated by the National Historic Sites Service of the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, is believed to be the first comprehensive architectural inventory in the world created for a computerized information system.

Called the Canadian Inventory of Historic Building, the project will take ten years to complete, beginning with studies of building exteriors and culminating with in-depth studies of the best structures. The first phase will record the exteriors of 100,000 buildings in five years to produce a broad view of our architectural heritage. The

fact the key to processing the seven million items of information that the first five years of the survey will produce.

Mrs. Meredith Sykes, one of the designers of the computerized inventory, points out that no other organization has used the computer in this way. Although organizations in other countries have inventoried selected areas of buildings, none has attempted so detailed and extensive a survey.

"The technique," Mrs. Sykes explains, "is to break the exterior of the building into some 70 categories to answer the question 'what kind of'—what kind of wall construction or window trim, for example. These categories could describe a building anywhere in the world, but are geared to Canadian features. They represent build-

ing characteristics particular to Canada." The uniqueness of this inventory lies in its specific objective of disclosing concentrations of usable, attractive buildings in downtown urban areas. Any city that is growing and undergoing redevelopment lacks space, and downtown space is at a premium. The frequent solution is to destroy old but solid, and often historic buildings to make way for high-rise structures.

James Acland, professor of architecture of the University of Toronto, and a co-designer of the inventory explains the importance of a nation-wide survey. "Our building record is at present hidden away in archives, libraries, planning departments, county, township and municipal offices, and in provincial surveys. As a result we stagger from one crisis to the next in historic preservation. If a new highway, a harbour complex or an industrial park is projected, some means must be found to find out at once the possible loss entailed in demolition of old buildings. What we need is an information bank so that we may know what we have, where it is and how best we might use it."

The data compiled through this National Historic Sites Service survey will ultimately be made available, in catalogue form, to all provinces for use in their own planning in this field. In preparing a basis for building evaluation, the Service team will also help to encourage efforts of interested individuals and private enterprise in restoration and use of worthwhile structures.



for eventual integration with the computerized inventory.

The inventory will survey over 200 years of Canadian building, from the earliest surviving buildings, dating from the late 1600s and primarily found in Quebec province, to those built at the turn of the 19th century found throughout Canada. To date the bulk of data has been gathered in Quebec and Ontario, the earliest permanently settled regions. The present historical boundary for the survey is 1880 for the eastern provinces, and 1914 for the West. The oldest surviving buildings of Vancouver, for example, are relatively modern structures dating from the 1880s.

Mrs. Sykes elaborated on the uniqueness of the new computerized system. "Other surveys are usually small, cover limited areas, and are random. Ours is standard—it asks standard questions, lists standard answers. The use of our recorder sheets really makes the system special."

At the core of the survey is an eight-page list on which the field surveyor checks off the features of the particular building being examined. Categories range from "histori-

c significance" and "present use" (the latter listing no less than 30 descriptions from which the surveyor may choose), to exterior architectural features. In turn, these categories are broken down into the particular characteristics typical of Canadian architecture. Simple illustrations show the exact form of building detail, varieties of structural plan, or method of construction. The section on wall construction, for example, lists wood, earth, brick, stone, iron, steel and concrete. Further, the building material used may have up to eight textures or patterns—all carefully drawn and named on the recorder sheets for the surveyor's discerning eye. An important aspect of the system is that new information can be added at any point.

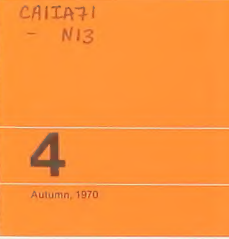
provincial organizations concerned with preservation, and the Historic Buildings Committee of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada. Indian Affairs and Northern Development Minister Jean Chrétien said that a preliminary assessment of the summer's field work will be sent to all provinces and private associations active in the field to solicit their comments and advice. The Minister expects that the inventory will provide a valuable basis for federal-provincial co-operation in preserving buildings with the greatest historical and architectural significance throughout Canada.



1 Like hundreds of other Canadian cities, downtown St. John's Newfoundland still has rows of old but solid frame housing.

2 Section of a recorder sheet designed for the inventory. The drawings are geared to Canadian architectural elements, and their variety shows the richness of our building heritage.

3 The old Bonsecours Market, once part of the bustling Montreal waterfront area, today houses the City Planning Office. Built in the 1880s, it was recently restored by the City of Montreal.



## Stocking the Stone Store on the Red River



The grog shop on the first floor of the furloft building is stocked with 19th-century style bottles, crocks, and casks.

# National Historic Parks News

Lower Fort Garry, built between 1831-36 about 19 miles north of Winnipeg, is the only remaining stone fort built by the Hudson's Bay Company during the 18th and 19th centuries. Its history was closely tied to the growth of western Canada, and it ultimately became a national historic park in 1951.

Since then, the National Historic Sites Service has undertaken its second most ambitious restoration project (next to the Fortress of Louisbourg National Historic Park, N.S.), in refurbishing the fort's major buildings as a showcase for historical presentation of western Canada's frontier past.

Since the majority of local people were farmers, not trappers, and since neither the quality nor quantity of furs in the Red River district was particularly good, fur trading was of relatively minor importance at Lower Fort Garry. However, the fort played an important part in the fur trade as provision and trans-shipment centre for the northern brigades.

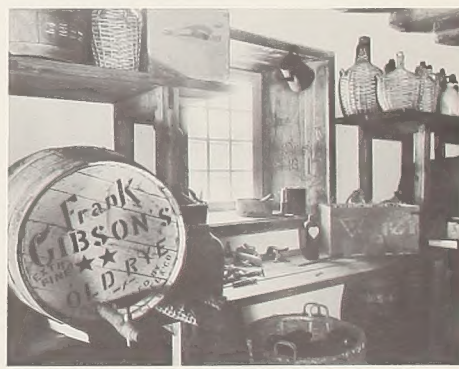
The hub of activity at the fort in the 1860s was the sales shop and furloft building. Like an outsized general store, the shop was stocked with every sort of item required by farmers, housewives, artisans and trappers of the frontier settlement.

When a shopper visited the Hudson's Bay Company Red River post in 1865, he brought his own jug for molasses or vinegar—but did he bring his own basket, or did the store provide wrapping paper?

Such details as these have preoccupied the curatorial staff of the National Historic Sites Service for over a year as they stocked the restored sales shop and furloft building.

Two years ago the Service curators began their search for the thousands of articles—either originals or faithful reproductions—required to duplicate the clutter of the Company store as it was in 1865. Inventories of stock on hand and requisitions for goods ordered from Europe were found in the London Archives of the Hudson's Bay Company and the National Archives in Ottawa. These lists, drawn up in the 1860s, were detailed to the extent of describing such minutia as the colours of Indian trade beads. They included artisans tools (coopers' adzes to scythe stones), clothing (alpaca aprons to silk bonnet wire), over 80 varieties of fabrics; and household goods such as tin candle molds, Brussels carpet bags, "Highlanders" playing cards, lined iron teaspoons and china.

To have the century-old merchandise accurately reproduced, it was necessary to





find craftsmen and manufacturers capable of fulfilling the task.

Some skills once indigenous to Canada are now almost non-existent. The story of the brightly patterned arrow sash and the weaving technique it involved goes back to the beginnings of the Canadian fur trade. In the early 19th century, most of the "ceintures flechées" (called "French belts" by the Scots) were made by the home weavers of L'Assomption near Montreal, and by the 1860s the 12 to 15 foot sash was a familiar sight in the Red River country. Today few weavers practise the old and complex technique, but the sashes on display were finger-woven and braided by one such Quebec craftsman, Madame Suzanne Gaisale of Longueuil.

old "Copeland Late Spode" trademark and the "N.H.S.S. Reproduction" mark customarily found on National Historic Sites Service reproductions.

Then there was the packaging. Edward Boulter of the Service curatorial section explains that this was one of the more difficult aspects of 19th-century merchandising to duplicate. "Containers have now become collectors' items. It is difficult to find labelled material today," Boulter points out.

Artifacts to serve as prototypes for ceramic toothpaste jars had already been found by archaeologists excavating the Lower Fort Garry site. But how were old ink pots, sauce bottles, mustard pots and gin bottles packaged and labelled?

journey, but these sturdy containers could be used again and again.

The Chinese "tea chests", ingeniously designed to protect tea from the flavour-destroying air, was constructed of thin hardwood, lined with sheet-lead and a silky-textured paper, and covered with a coarse matting of rice straw. Then the chest was stamped and labelled with the name of the district grower or manufacturer. The lead proved useful to the men in isolated posts for various repairs as well as for melting down into musket bullets. And when Rev. James Evans invented the Indian syllabic script at Norway House in 1840, he cast his lead type from the lining of a Hudson's Bay tea chest. Seeking a prototype for the 19th-century chest, Boulter under-



textiles, blankets, clothing, chests of tea, barrels of sugar and china, rolls of carpeting, cases of soaps, hardware and guns. Some cases of merchandise and rolls of material have been left partially open so visitors may examine the contents more closely.

The furloft, occupying the top floor of the three-storey building, displays the proportion and variety of furs it held a century ago. Buffalo robes and the furs of muskrat and fox trapped around the Red River district were sent there after being traded for merchandise on the ground floor, or at one of Lower Fort Garry's outposts. Here loose furs were packed in 80 to 115-pound bales with the aid of a baling press and later shipped in flat-bottomed York boats

1 Century-old destination markings have been reproduced on crates and bales in the second floor storage area. "GL" meant Lower Fort Garry.

2 View over the U-shaped sales shop counter. Counters, shelves, drawers and cubbyholes are reconstructions based on wall and floor markings left by the originals. In the mid-1860s, the store served some 2,500; about 20 could stand at the counter at one time.

3 Student guides, costumed in 19th-century Red River dress, pose in front of the furloft building.

4 The furloft building is one of the largest and most solid buildings in the fort. Much of this original internal structure remains, but restoration involved consolidating the foundations and rebuilding the roof.

5 Part of the third-storey furloft display is a 19th-century baling press. A bale of buffalo robes, ready for shipment, lies in the foreground.

6 The shop clerk's quarters, occupied in the 1860s by one Frederick Campbell, are furnished with a fine 19th-century pine chest. The bearded muskox skull, purchased locally, is a rarity.



The Christie-Brown Company of Toronto contributed to the Manitoba Centennial via the Lower Fort Garry sales shop by mixing and baking a batch of 25,000 hard-tack biscuits using the old recipe and new brass dies (copied from a century-old biscuit found in the Hudson's Bay Collection of artifacts).

Since the Bay stores no longer stock the white blanket with indigo bar popular in the mid-19th century, the Charles Early and Marriott Company of Witley, England was engaged by the Service to manufacture the indigo pattern along with a quantity of the blue, scarlet, emerald and rufous stripes blankets it produced for the Hudson's Bay Company in the 1860s.

With the aid of the staff of the Spode Works at Stoke-on-Trent, England, and Toronto, it was learned that the 1860s and '60s the Copeland Company enjoyed complete monopoly for supplying tableware to the Hudson's Bay Company. Some of the old china patterns are still manufactured today. However, many of the pieces common in the 1860s are no longer stocked and so were specially reproduced with the

While browsing through picture catalogues in the National Gallery, Boulter noted a tiny white-labelled ink pot in the corner of a 19th-century painting of "A Meeting of the School Trustees." An identical pot with label intact was turned up by an antique dealer, and it ultimately served as a model for labelling the clay ink pots placed in the fort store.

Lea and Perrins is still making the sauce it manufactured in the 1860s, but the packaging has changed. The only Lea and Perrins bottle available with wrapping and seal intact was obtained from the London firm by contacting the owner himself. The Service already had a quantity of 19th-century Lea and Perrins bottles, and all were then wrapped, tied and sealed in 19th-century style packages.

In the same manner, R.C.M. de Kuyper was consulted on the original packaging of the de Kuyper Dutch gin bottles and cases circa 1865.

Often containers served more than one purpose at the frontier posts. Not only did the old mustard pots keep dry mustard moisture-free over the long transatlantic



took a painstaking search through old grocers' catalogues, and found a linocut model for what was to become possibly the only grass-matted tea chest in North America.

When the sales shop and furloft building was visited by Prince Philip and Prince Charles in mid-July, there were comments on how new things looked in the store. In fact, aside from a quantity of 19th-century crocks and bottles, kettles, some fabrics and trimmings, and a partially restored 1872 stove, everything is new. Tin molds are shiny, corn brooms smell clean, and coloured by cashes are unaltered by age. Comments Boulter: "Of course people are not visiting an antique shop, but the store as it was in 1865. At that time everything was new, not restored."

Sharing the first floor of the building with the sales shop are a grog shop, a receiving and storage area for country produce, and the clerk's furnished office and bedroom.

The second floor is primarily a storage area for the yearly stock of trade. The room has been stocked, as it was in 1865, with bulk quantities of animal traps, bales of



to York Factory, the last stop in transit to Hudson's Bay Company headquarters in London. Occasionally bales from other forts passed through for repacking or transshipment, and were stored briefly in the furloft.

In May, 1971, the sales shop and furloft building will be officially opened to the public. In the meanwhile, the Service curators are continuing their research into the finer points of merchandising and packaging at the Lower Fort Garry store.

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